

**Testing Waiver Workgroup
Notes on Meeting**

Date: November 16, 2006

Location: MSD of Wayne Township,
1220 South High School Road, Indianapolis 46241

Members Present: Kathy Parks, Gibson Southern High School (Chair); Shawn Sriver, Division of Professional Standards; Debby Williams, Division of Professional Standards; Dave Kinman, Indiana University; Bev Reitsma, University of Indianapolis; Judy Sheese, Indiana State University; Rep. Vernon Smith, Indiana University—Northwest; Jane Swiss, University of St. Francis

Ms. Kathy Parks gave an overview of the charge of the workgroup. The charge is to determine whether there should be a waiver for students who fail Praxis I but do not have disabilities. If the work group would determine that a process should exist, then the work group should determine the process that would be used.

Mr. Shawn Sriver added that the work group is to make a recommendation to the advisory board of the division of professional standards and to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Should a process be recommended, and the recommendation approved, then the process would need to be promulgated into rule.

Mr. Sriver gave a brief overview of the materials that were sent to the committee prior to the meeting. These materials included the 2005 and 2006 Annual Testing Report, a copy of 515 IAC 1-4-1, the rule that includes the testing waiver criteria for students with disabilities, a document sent to candidates outlining the requirements and process for disability testing waivers, a chart showing the number of testing waivers approved by the Proficiency Evaluation Committee (PEC) during the last three years, the results of a survey conducted by the division of professional standards (DPS) listing the waivers for testing that exist in 24 other states, and an e-mail outlining the potential impact a testing waiver would have on accreditation of higher education units and on No Child Left Behind.

Mr. Sriver spent additional time briefing the work group on the testing waiver process currently used for students with a disability.

Mrs. Parks asked work group members to share their initial views on this issue.

Dr. Vernon Smith shared the genesis of his interest in this issue. He commented on the fact that he had worked with a group of students through Project Team with Hispanic, African-American, or first-generation European backgrounds. He shared that he had worked with several “wonderful” candidates that had strong backgrounds, but had been unsuccessful in passing Praxis I. He discussed the concern that, in these situations, one criterion led to the denial of licensure when the candidate displayed so much strength in the other criteria. He indicated that his intent was not to lessen the standards or lower the bar. Rather, he wanted the students to be viewed more holistically. Dr. Smith also talked about several candidates who had taken parts of Praxis I 10 to 12 times without success in meeting the state cut-off score.

Another committee member brought up the example of a teacher who had displayed a strong background and desire to teach Spanish. This teacher had passed the Praxis II and the reading and writing sections of Praxis I, but was not able to pass Praxis I in mathematics. It was pointed out that the teacher would not be likely to utilize mathematics in the Spanish curriculum.

In addition to the individual students that he had worked with, Dr. Smith indicated that he had observed a huge number of emergency permits in school districts that are hard to staff. He indicated concern over the idea these school districts are allowed to hire individuals under an emergency permit, when other strong candidates are not allowed to teach because of Praxis I. *[It should be noted that individuals who have completed teacher education programs are barred from obtaining an emergency permit in their content area if they have not passed Praxis I]*

Several committee members acknowledged that the concept of multiple measures is consistent with the standards-based educational preparation system. However, the view was that Indiana has placed all of the eggs in one basket. Dr. Bev Reitsma indicated that the University of Indianapolis would be open to a waiver option, but that “the elephant in the room” was accreditation.

The group discussed that Praxis I was used by institutions in Indiana as a requirement prior to the licensure decision. Dr. Kinman indicated that the Praxis I was required in the spring of the person’s freshman year at Indiana University. Dr. Swiss and Dr. Smith indicated that Praxis I was required prior to admission into Teacher Education at their institutions. Dr. Reitsma indicated that Praxis I was required at the end of the sophomore year, but that students were encouraged to complete it in the summer between the freshman and sophomore year. It was acknowledged that one of the complicating factors in this issue is that the institution’s entrance requirement is different than the state’s licensure requirement, even though the instrument is identical.

The group discussed the requirement of NCATE that institutions show a passing rate of 80% or face a “Not Met” under Standard 1. The group acknowledged that this added a new dimension to the conversation. Dr. Jane Swiss indicated that there were really two items on the table: 1) candidates who have difficulty in passing Praxis I and 2) NCATE accreditation. Dr. Swiss reminded the committee that waivers are counted as failures under NCATE and that one failure can really have a negative impact on a small institution.

Dr. David Kinman clarified that NCATE requires 80% passage rate on Praxis II, but that NCATE does not speak to Praxis I. He indicated that while institutions had to show 80% passage on an assessment instrument, there was no NCATE requirement indicating that Praxis I was the required instrument. Mrs. Parks reminded the committee that the charge for the work group included only the possibility for waivers under Praxis I. The committee recognized that Dr. Kinman’s clarifications lessened the concern over a negative impact from NCATE should a waiver process be adopted, assuming that other assessments, including the SAT and ACT, were appropriate to show 80% passage under NCATE. Dr. Judy Sheese of Indiana State University also reminded the committee that the issue over Highly Qualified and No Child Left Behind was limited to Praxis II, minimizing the committee’s concern over this issue, should a waiver process be adopted.

The discussion centered on the purpose of Praxis I. Praxis I is viewed as a Basic Skills test. Dr. Kinman questioned whether Praxis I was the correct assessment to use for licensure. Dr. Kinman discussed the existence of a test offered by Educational Testing Service (ETS) called Principals of Learning and Teaching. He indicated that this exam was used by some states (in addition to Praxis II) as the licensure requirement. He discussed that this test centered more on pedagogy and might be a more appropriate tool to use for a licensure requirement. In addition, there was discussion that while Praxis I is appropriate as a pre-service (entrance into a teacher education program) for institutions, it does not adequately assess what the committee felt should be assessed for licensure.

The question was asked as to how the Indiana Professional Standards Board (the previous name for the Division of Professional Standards) came to adopt Praxis I. Mr. Sriver indicated that in the late 80s, the National Teacher Exam (NTE) Core Battery was adopted as the licensure requirement. The Core Battery included three parts—Communication Skills, General Knowledge and Professional Knowledge. In the late-90s, ETS eliminated the NTE Core Battery. The IPSB adopted, in some part as a result of advice from ETS, Praxis I. Dr. Kinman noted that the Principals of Learning and Teaching exam was equivalent to Professional Knowledge under the NTE Core Battery.

Dr. Sheese indicated that the larger question might be whether Praxis I was the appropriate test. *[It should be stressed that the committee understands that their charge, and the advisory board’s authority, is limited only to the required assessment for licensure. Institutions would continue to hold authority over the requirements of their program.]*

Dr. Smith reiterated his concerns about putting too much emphasis on one criterion and suggested that an “academic portrait” be used to determine licensure. He indicated that Praxis I was not a university or

NCATE requirement, but a state requirement. He stated that if Praxis I was not the requirement, that institutions might change their entrance requirements.

Mrs. Parks indicated that, while the conversation of whether Praxis I was the appropriate test was a valid and important discussion, that it was outside the charge of our committee.

After further discussion, the committee felt strongly that any waiver process would be a “band-aid” to a bigger problem and that the larger issue needed discussion prior to any further discussion of a waiver process. The committee also felt that “comparable criteria” or “comparable measures” should be discussed and that elimination of an assessment instrument for licensure should not be an option.

Group Consensus:

The consensus of the group was that Mr. Sriver should discuss the possibility with Dr. Suellen Reed of expanding this group’s charge to include a look at whether Praxis I is the appropriate assessment tool to be used for licensure purposes.